

BETSY PRESCOTT HOUSE
South side of Dover Road, Route 4,
.15 miles west of Main Street
Chichester
Merrimack County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-218

HABS
NH,
7-CHIS,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Location: South side of Dover Road, Route 4, .15 miles west of
Main Street, Chichester, Merrimack County, New Hampshire

USGS Suncook Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 19.304560.4790505

Present Owner: Richard and Martha Sanborn

Use: Residence

Significance: The Betsy Prescott House is significant architecturally as the only surviving one-and-a-half story late eighteenth century house along Route 4 in Chichester. The historic name reflects the earliest known owner of the house. It was chosen because the original owner was not traceable through deed research; there were no prominent or longterm owners of the house; and the house lacks a street number.

It is likely that the house was built shortly after Route 4 was laid out in 1792 as the First New Hampshire Turnpike, a major transportation route that linked Concord and Portsmouth. Although the new turnpike resulted in a number of houses erected shortly thereafter along its Chichester section, only three still stand. (The other two are two-and-a-half story frame houses.) In recent years, Route 4 has given way to increasing commercialization, causing rapid physical changes and threatening the existence of residences that front onto it.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** circa 1790s. Surviving architectural detail in the northwest room indicates that the house dates from the late eighteenth century, probably shortly after the turnpike was laid out in 1792. The first traceable deed reference is 1844. Three years later, a deed transaction refers to the property as the same as that "formerly owned and occupied by Betsy Prescott, alias Betsy Moore" (Book 87, Page 165). However, there are no transactions recorded under either name in the grantor or grantee indices, nor is there a record of Thomas Langmaid's purchase to allow further deed tracking.
2. **Architect:** None
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** The original owner is not known. The earliest known owner is Betsy Prescott, who lived here prior to 1844. Post-1823 references to the chain of title to the land and buildings are in the Merrimack County Registry of Deeds, Concord New Hampshire. Rockingham County records, which are at the New Hampshire Archives, Concord, New Hampshire, were checked for pre-1823 deeds.

1844 Deed, December 9, 1844, recorded in Book 78, Page 68.
Thomas D. Langmaid to Joseph B. Hook

1847 Deed, March 16, 1847, recorded in Book 85, Page 130.
Thomas D. Langmaid et. al. to Joseph B. Hook

1847 Deed, March 16, 1847, recorded in Book 87, Page 165.
Joseph B. Hook to George W. Drake

1863 Deed, December 14, 1863, recorded in Book 174, Page 65.
George W. Drake and Martha A. Drake to Charles C. Drake

1888 Deed, June 19, 1888, recorded in Book 282, Page 400.
Charles C. Drake to Benjamin and Mary Lake

1890 Deed, April 4, 1890, recorded in Book 295, Page 595.
Benjamin and Mary Lake to Sarah M. Mason

1892 Deed, April 30, 1892, recorded in Book 298, Page 300.
Sarah Mason to Mary Moore

- 1900 Deed, December 21, 1900, recorded in Book 339, Page 374.
Mary D. Moore to Harrison W. Moore
- 1933 Deed, November 17, 1933, recorded in Book 531, Page 185
Harrison W. Moore to Jennie A. Quimby
- 1936 Deed, July 20, 1936, recorded in Book 544, Page 613.
Jennie A. Quimby to Charles E. Ingalls
- 1938 Deed, July 14, 1938, recorded in Book 545, Page 519.
Charles E. Ingalls to Edward E. Pinkham
- 1939 Deed, November 6, 1939, recorded in Book 574, Page 22.
Edward E. Pinkham to Hiram V. Griswold
- 1944 Deed, September 27, 1944, recorded in Book 610, Page 521.
Hiram Griswold to Hazel A. Seifert
- 1944 Deed, September 27, 1944, recorded in Book 604, Page 223.
Hazel A. Seifert to Eugene G. Millett
- 1947 Deed, October 3, 1947, recorded in Book 644, Page 143.
Eugene G. Millett to Louise E. & Robert Garland
- 1960 Deed, December 2, 1960, recorded in Book 872, Page 310.
Louise E. Garland & Robert Garland to Richard C. & Martha Sanborn

- 4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** Unknown
- 5. **Original plans and construction:** No original drawings or plans are likely to exist.

The house was constructed with two front rooms separated by a small front entryway which backed onto a central chimney. Behind the northwest room was a kitchen which extended partially across the rear of the house. It is not known if the rear attached sheds were original to the house.

- 6. **Alterations and additions:** The front entryway was blocked off from the northwest room shortly after World War II, at which time the bathroom was added. It is not known when the central chimney was removed, although it is probable it coincides with the bathroom addition. The subfloor framing of the house was replaced around this time, as well. The roofline was raised in the rear, initially only at the western end to extend the kitchen (probably early nineteenth century). The roof extension was continued along the entire south elevation in the late 1940s,

and the entire east side of the house opened up into a single room finished in knotty pine. The rear sheds were entirely rebuilt and converted to living space in the mid-twentieth century.

B. Historical Context

The Prescott House is one of only three surviving houses in Chichester associated with the early period of the New Hampshire Turnpike and which lie along its route. It stands on its original site, facing north toward the turnpike. For about fifty years, or until the arrival of the railroad, the turnpike was the economic and commercial backbone of the region, fostering residential and commercial development along its length.

The earliest known owner of the house is Betsy Prescott about whom no information can be located. Mid-nineteenth century owners of the property, Thomas D. Langmaid, Joseph B. Hook and George W. Drake, were all associated with early Chichester families, though none owned it for more than a few years. Charles C. Drake, who owned the property from 1863 until 1888, was a hotel proprietor on the turnpike.

The earliest deeds located indicate that the house always stood on a lot of less than two acres, suggesting the house was never part of a farm.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Betsy Prescott House is a late eighteenth century, one-and-a-half story, three-bay frame house of simple design, with rear ell and attached nineteenth century barn built along an early turnpike route.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The house is in sound condition. Original architectural features are limited to the northwest (front) room. Remaining rooms in the main house were extensively altered in the mid-twentieth century. The ell, converted from sheds in the same period, contains much late nineteenth century salvage material.

B. Description of Exterior

1. **Overall dimensions:** The main house is rectangular in plan, measuring 28' across and 25' deep. The rear ell, also rectangular, measures 19' across and 26' deep. The attached barn measures 19' across and 24' deep.

2. **Foundation:** The foundation material is cinderblock where visible (south end of main house and ell), with granite block on the outer face of the main house above grade level.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls are clapboard with flat board trim. On the north (upper section) and west elevations, the clapboards are feathered.
4. **Structural system:** The house is of post and girt construction, although the framing beneath the first floor (where visible and likely throughout) was replaced with new 2x8 joists, 16" on center. The roof framing was not accessible for viewing, but was described by the owner as hand-hewn rafters and purlins with pegged joints.
5. **Patio, deck:** A concrete slab, on-grade patio extends from the east side of the ell.
6. **Chimneys:** The main house lacks a chimney. A short, brick chimney rises from the east roof slope of the ell, near the juncture with the main house.
7. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** The main entry door, located in the center of the north front, is mid-twentieth century and has two horizontal glass panels and two vertical wooden panels beneath. On the east side of the ell is a double-width doorway with sliding glass doors. Close to the main house on that same side is a back entrance, with a mid-twentieth century door consisting of horizontal glass and wood panels. The west side of the ell has an enclosed gabled portico at the southwest corner; the early twentieth century door has horizontal glass and wood panels.
 - b. **Windows and shutters:** The primary window sash is two-over-one, double-hung and wooden. On the east elevation the sash is paired. Horizontal slider windows are located at the southeast corner of the house, one on the east elevation and two on the south. All windows have mid-twentieth century, vertical board shutters.
8. **Roof:**
 - a. **Shape, covering:** The gable roofs (house and ell) are clad in asphalt.
 - b. **Eaves:** On the front of the main house, a simple cornice detail is found, consisting of a flat, angled board that

connects the roof eave to the top wall trim board. There are no gutters.

C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** The main house consists of one finished floor with a crawl space beneath and an unfinished attic which is accessible through a hatch. The first floor includes a front entry, a front room in the northwest corner, a room on the east side that runs front-to-back, and a kitchen behind the northwest room. A bathroom is located behind the front entry in the space formerly occupied by the central chimney. The one-story ell, which was once unfinished sheds, contains three bedrooms along the west side and a single room along most of the east side. Connected to the south end of the ell is a barn. A full, unfinished cellar is found beneath the ell. (See attached floor plan sketch)
2. **Stairways:** The only stairway is located in the northeast corner of the ell; it leads to the cellar and lacks architectural detail.
3. **Flooring:** Flooring in the northwest room is wide pine boards that are painted. Elsewhere in the main house and ell, flooring is southern pine.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** All interior walls are plaster and lack any decorative details. In the entry hall and east room of the main house, the walls were clad with knotty pine in the late 1940s (source: owner). The ceiling in the east room of the main house is tiled with beaver board; elsewhere they are plaster.

The northwest room retains much of its late eighteenth century finish. The cased corner boards have beaded edges. Ceiling and wall plaster is early. The flat chairrail along the west wall is new. Baseboards are seven inches high and capped with a beaded edge.

The ell has plaster walls and ceiling; a narrow cove molding runs along the cornice.

5. **Openings:**

- a. **Doorways and doors:** In the northwest room of the main house, there are two raised four-panel doors dating from the late eighteenth century. Casings in the room are flat, with a typical, late eighteenth century narrow backband molding. In the east room casings are knotty pine. Within the ell there is a mix of early-twentieth century French and horizontal

five-panel doors, as well as several late-nineteenth century doors with four recessed molded panels. Door casings are flat boards.

- b. **Windows:** Window casings in the northwest room are flat, with a narrow molding strip at the outer edge and beaded inner edges. In the east room trim is knotty pine. Elsewhere in the main house and ell, window trim is flat.
- 6. **Hardware:** Wrought iron thumb latches are found in the northwest room on the two doors. Door hardware in the ell is a mix of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.
- 7. **Mechanical equipment:**
 - a. **Heating:** The heating system is a forced hot water system fueled by oil with cast iron radiators.
 - b. **Lighting:** There are no early lighting fixtures.
 - c. **Plumbing:** There are no early plumbing fixtures.
- D. **Site:**
 - 1. **General setting and orientation:** The house faces north toward Route 4. The ell and barn extend to the rear (south) of the house. The buildings are located approximately in the center of the nearly two acre lot, with a twenty foot setback from the road. To the west of the house lawn extends to the property line. To the east is a small fruit orchard and, close to the lot line, a small pine grove. The rear of the lot is lawn, with saplings close to the lot line.
 - 2. **Outbuildings:**
 - a. **Barn:** Attached to the south end of the ell is a nineteenth century barn that now serves as a garage. It is clad with clapboards. Two sets of hinged doors made of narrow, vertical boards and hung on reproduction iron strap hinges, lead to the interior. The south end contains two windows on the first story and one in the gable; all have six-over-six sash. A small doorway with a mid-twentieth century door is found on the west elevation. The interior is post and girt construction with hand-hewn beams and pegged joints.
 - b. **Shed:** Behind the barn lies a small shed built ca. 1950 as a boathouse. It has a gable roof and is clad with wooden sheathing.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Interviews:** Richard Sanborn, owner
Interviewed January 11, 1990 at building site

B. **Bibliography:**

1. **Primary and unpublished sources:**

Deeds and probates, Merrimack County Registry of Deeds and
Probates, Concord, New Hampshire
Henderson, Oren V., "The First New Hampshire Turnpike".
Unpublished manuscript in New Hampshire Historical
Society library, 1935.

2. **Secondary and published sources:**

Brown, D.T., "History of Chichester". In History of Merrimack
and Belknap Counties, New Hampshire. D. Hamilton Hurd,
ed. Philidelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1885
Chichester History Committee, A History of Chichester, written
on the occasion of our 250th anniversary 1727-1977.
Goldthwait, J.W., "Six Old New Hampshire Turnpikes". In
New Hampshire Highways, vol. 10, no. 1., July 1932.
Concord and Merrimack County Directory, 1900-1929
"New Hampshire Turnpikes". In New Hampshire Highways, vol. 2,
no. 4, July 1924.
Prescott, William, The Prescott Memorial. Boston: Henry
W. Dutton & Son, 1870.
The Town Register, "Chichester". Augusta, ME: Mitchell
Cony Co., 1909.

3. **Maps and Atlases:**

1805	Plan of Chichester
1816	Plan of Chichester
1858	Map of Merrimack County
1892	"Chichester", in Atlas of the State of New Hampshire

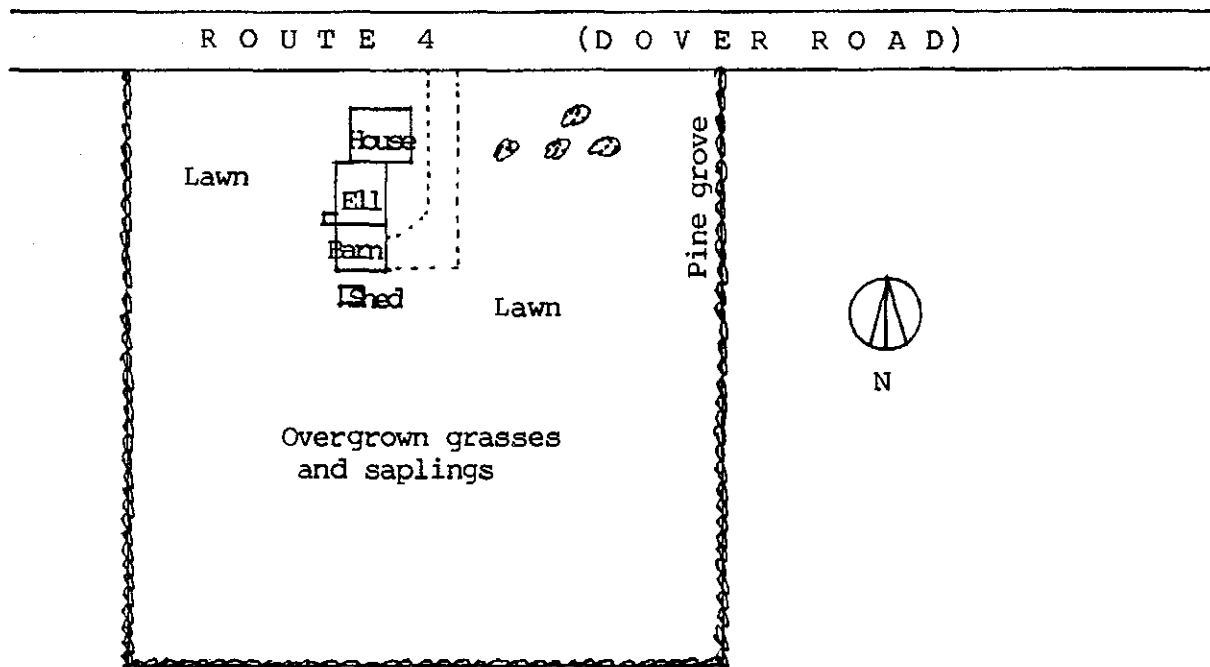
E. **Likely sources not yet investigated:** Chichester is unfortunate
in that it is lacking in research and materials documenting its history
and architecture. The first town history was not published until
1977, and it has little material to draw from. A local historical
society was not organized until the same period. There are no surviving
early tax records. Thus, much of the town's history has been lost,
and assessments of buildings within the community must rely strongly
on physical evidence.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Federal Highway Administration and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation propose to reconstruct a segment of US Route 4 in Chichester, New Hampshire (Project Name: Chichester, F-012-2(17), P4809-K). Pursuant to this end and the implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC, Sec. 470(f)), a Memorandum of Agreement dated April 11, 1988 was entered into by the Federal Highway Administration and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. In accordance with the terms of this agreement, the documentation herein is undertaken.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Durfee Hengen
Title: Preservation Consultant, Concord, New Hampshire
Date: March 15, 1990

SKETCH SITE PLAN
1" = 100'



BETSY PRESCOTT HOUSE
HABS No. NH-218 (page 11)

FLOOR PLAN
1" = 10'

